

Battle of Inchon: The Task Force

Allied commanders labeled the United Nations' fleet responsible for the Inchon landings "Joint Task Force 7." Assembled in just eight weeks, the 180 American and 60 allied ship task force contained several types of vessels to help the U.S. Army and Marine Corps ground forces overcome the many obstacles the Inchon harbor presented. While the number of ships in the U.S. Navy's inventories in 1950 was only a fraction of its size during World War II, it still was the only fleet in the world with the specialized ships and talents capable of executing the operation successfully.

Shore Bombardment: The responsibility of heavy shore bombardment against North Korean defenses fell to the Navy's cruisers, specifically two of their newer ones: *USS Toledo* (CA 124) and *Rochester* (CA 123). This burden was lifted by extensively using the task force's destroyers' five-inch guns, with the ability to fire close to shore and provide support in real time. Amphibious forces gave additional reinforcement using specialized rocket ships.

Air Cover and Support: At the beginning of the Korean War, the U.S. Navy's aircraft carrier inventory was severely depleted and some of it needed to be kept in the Atlantic to monitor the Soviet Union. For

the Inchon landings, the Navy could only summon three fleet aircraft carriers: *USS Phillipine Sea* (CV 47), *Valley Forge* (CV 45), and *Boxer* (CV 21). In addition, two escort carriers, *USS Sicily* (CVE-118) and *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116), carried Corsairs belonging to the United States Marine Corps.

Amphibious Assault: The largest portion and most important section of the task force were the ships carrying the men and their gear to shore and into battle. This amphibious assault group also presented the biggest resources issue. The amphibious and transport fleet had been slashed by over 85% since the end of World War II. U.S. Navy leadership sent every ship of these types to Japan in preparation for the operation. In all 149 ships of fourteen different types, including transport and amphibious assault, participated in the Inchon landings.

Seabees: To keep the Inchon beachhead reinforced and supplied, Navy Seabees' Amphibious Construction Battle One, or ACB-1 for short, built temporary pontoon piers to allow tanks and trucks to land with ease. ACB-1 Seabees also built an airfield on Wolmi-Do Island to allow aircraft to land near the battlefield.

Sailors aboard *USS Toledo* (CA 145) load up eight-inch shells and powder bags at Sasebo, Japan in preparation for the landings. With only one commissioned battleship available, the burden of shore support at Inchon fell on the shoulders of the Navy's cruisers and destroyers.

An LST docks at one of the newly constructed pontoon causeways at "Red Beach." Completed by the Seabees' ACB-1, the causeway allowed for the Marines and Army to offload their heavy equipment and supplies easily onto Inchon's shore.

One of the task force's rocket ships fires two rockets at North Korean targets while the Marine landing teams begin their approach to Inchon.



With Marines dug in on the beach, *USS LST-859* and two smaller amphibious assault ships unload their cargo under fire on the first day of the landings. The possession of such specialized vessels allowed the Navy to execute a complex operation like the Inchon landings. (Image Colorized)